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ABSTRACT

An instructional and mainstreaming model for programming severely learning disabled (LD) elementary students is described, in which students receive instruction for one half of the school day in an LD classroom and are successfully mainstreamed in general education for the remaining part of the day is described. It is explained that components of the model include entry procedure, continuous reassessment and replanning procedures and time lines; academic and behavioral assessment instruments; step-by-step interpretation of diagnostic data and development of an individualized educational plan; elementary curriculum in reading, mathematics, and written language; well-developed mainstreaming procedures and activities; and materials and forms. (BD)

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# PROJECT HARMONY - SUCCESS FOR THE LEARNING DISABLED IN THE MAINSTREAM

Project Harmony

Ingham Intermediate School District

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PROJECT HARMONY - SUCCESS FOR THE LEARNING DISABLED

Project Harmony is a comprehensive and replicable instructional and mainstreaming model for programming for severely learning disabled elementary students. The model combines the most promising developments in the field into a coordinated, many-faceted system. Severely learning disabled students receive systematic instruction for one half of the school day in an LD classroom and are successfully mainstreamed in general education for the remaining part of the day. Components of the Harmony model include: entry procedures; continuous re-assessment and re-planning procedures and time lines; academic and behavioral assessment instruments; step-by-step interpretation of diagnostic data and development of an individualized educational plan; elementary curriculum in Reading, Mathematics, and Written Language; well-developed mainstreaming procedures and activities; materials and forms. The effectiveness of the model has been evaluated for the past four years through controlled achievement comparisons with students in traditional L.D. classrooms with encouraging results.

With the inclusion of the category of learning disabled in Michigan's Mandatory Special Education Act, there has been a rapid increase in concern for children with learning disabilities. While P.L. 94-142 is considered to be The Education of ALL Handicapped Children Act, few questions occupy a higher place on the agenda of today's special educators than how to effectively program for the learning disabled in the least restrictive alternative. Concurrently, various experts in the field continue to espouse varied theories, many treatments, and inconclusive research about learning disabilities. Local administrators and teachers are calling for ways to individualize instruction, develop useful I.E.P's, and mainstream and consult with general education. Although educators and experts are struggling with definition, identification, theory, and programming for this rather confusing condition, the fact remains that many learning disabled students need effective service now.

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

Historically, movements and various approached to educating the learning disabled have guided programming and educational practices into narrow perspectives of learning disabilities and uni-faceted service models. The often wholesale acceptance and adoption of this or that approach has tended to "treat" learning disabled students in a single theoretical manner as a deficient organism that is in need of being changed or "fixed".

In addition to the practice of choosing uni-faceted theoretical approaches, the service or program models developed have emphasized certain aspects of programming while neglecting other aspects. For example, some service models offer systems for assessment and identification but not for classroom operation or curriculum. Others offer theoretical approaches and systems for developing an individual educational plan but have forgotten entry or mainstreaming procedures.

In the development of Project Harmony, the need for a total and comprehensive instructional and mainstreaming system was identified and goals set for a system that would include:

An eclectic theoretical approach that made use of the most promising developments in the field and clearly linked school learning with individual student's symptoms, learning styles, and learning levels;

systematic procedures for identification and entry that mesh with and enhance those required by law;

structured and precise ways to standardize the decision making process (a) in the development of a useful individual educational plan and (b) in classroom operations that remain flexible enough to allow creative teaching to flourish;

a task analyzed curriculum that aims instruction toward applicable life skills;

criterion referenced assessment for academic skills and objective assessment of the social/emotional behavioral status whose results translate directly into daily planning;

mainstreaming and consulting procedures that provide for regular communication and support for general education teachers.

Project Harmony was conceived in 1973-74 at Ingham Intermediate School District in an attempt to develop, test, revise, and offer just such an effective and comprehensive instructional and mainstreaming model.

PROJECT DESIGN

The nickname "Project Harmony" developed from a longer title: "HARMONIZING THE INDIVIDUALITY OF THE LEARNING DISABLED WITH INSTRUCTIONAL SYSTEMS TOWARD APPLICABLE LIFE SKILLS." As the longer title suggests, Project Harmony's philosophy embraces the idea that each individual learning disabled student's learning "status" (which includes learning style, behavior, levels, and skills) should be determined. Then the learning environment (including all aspects of the learning environment that can be controlled by the teacher) should be adjusted to "harmonize" with the student's learning status. The subsequent strategies and materials chosen to instruct the student should be those that primarily enhance the students' learning strengths while minimizing the weaknesses or interfering factors. The goals of all instruction in the L.D. class is applicable life skills or school learning skills including reading, mathematics, written language, and their application.

The tangible product of Project Harmony is "The Harmony Learning Disabilities Instructional and Mainstreaming Model." The Harmony model has been implemented in developmental and experimental programs that are operated as half day learning disability classrooms for severely learning disabled elementary students who spend the remaining half day in a general education classroom.

The components of the Harmony model that together compose a comprehensive program are:

1. OVERVIEW AND TIME LINE: represents graphically how the Harmony instructional components and procedures mesh with generally accepted procedures and procedures required by State and Federal law for Referral and Assessment, Placement and Planning, Entry and Implementation, and Mainstreaming and Follow-up of learning disabled students. The required personnel and time lines for each activity are also identified.

2. ENTRY SYSTEM AND SEQUENCE: insures program consistency for all students entering the Harmony classroom. The entry system and sequence lists the Harmony components in outline, flowchart, and narrative form in sequence of their implementation and defines

how they are inter-related. Steps outlined in this section insure (a) adequate information gathered to make appropriate placement decisions, (b) adequate information to develop an effective individual education plan, and (c) re-evaluation, charting of progress, redefining of objectives, and guiding the learning process in successive cycles.

3. SCHOOL STATUS INVENTORY - ACADEMIC: is a criterion-referenced test of reading, mathematics, and written language skills that provides curriculum-relevant information about the student's current skill levels. The Inventory includes a Test Item Manual with directions for administration and scoring, a Student Workbook for recording of student responses, a box of Stimulus Materials needed for certain items, and a Status Summary Sheet for recording the results. The results guide the setting of goals and objectives, facilitate planning, and in a pre-test/post-test situation, measure skill progress.

4. SCHOOL STATUS INVENTORY - BEHAVIORAL: is comprised of two parts, (a) Observation/Coding System, and (b) Behavioral Checklist. The Observation/Coding System gives directions for objectively coding a student's behavioral status according to behaviors observed as they fall into certain behavioral categories. These behaviors are simultaneously coded as they relate to the particular structure (or environment) situations. The results compare the learning disabled student's behavior with a "control" student's behavior in order to qualify any differences, to note behavioral strengths and weaknesses, and to identify any relationships between behaviors displayed and environmental conditions at the time. The Behavioral Checklist assesses the frequency and severity of certain behaviors as perceived by both the L.D. teacher and the general education teacher. The results help identify behavioral goals and objectives, suggest consultation strategies, and in pre-test/post-test form, measure behavioral progress.

5. PROCEDURES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTERVENTION PLAN (I.E.P.): outlines and explains in step-by-step fashion how to analyze test data, establish instructional priorities, determine a comprehensive schema of the student's learning status, and design environmental conditions and manipulate instructional variables so that they enhance the learning behavior of the student. The resultant I.E.P. includes goals, objectives, estimated time of attainment, strategies, materials, and a system for monitoring student progress. Forms for recording student status, goals and objectives, and assessment data are included.

6. CURRICULUM GUIDE FOR READING, MATHEMATICS, AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE: represents a comprehensive task analysis of the basic content taught within the L.D. class along with references to various instructional approaches and additional informal assessment tasks to aid in meaningful planning. This guide is intended to direct what to teach, and generally when to teach it, but NOT HOW TO TEACH IT.

7. CLASSROOM OPERATION: suggests learning center arrangements, daily procedures, scheduling, and materials considerations that have been developed, tested, and proven to be advantageous in implementing individualized and precise instruction. The model is designed to offer environmental choices, provide structure, encourage independence, and facilitate flexibiiity for programming for learning disabled students in the classroom.

8. MAINSTREAMING AND FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES: are negotiated and agreed upon responsibilities and activities of the L.D. teacher, general education teacher, principal, and other pertinent special services personnel who work with the learning disabled student. These procedures have been developed in an attempt to alleviate some of the typical problems encountered in mainstreaming and to maximize communication with general educators. The procedures include half day planning sessions, regular staffing meetings, exchange of triweekly reports, extensive parent contact, and progress reports.

ADVANTAGES OF PROJECT HARMONY

In addition to the comprehensive nature of the total program, Project Harmony's model offers flexibility in its adoption or adaption at the local district level. This fact has proven vital to the success of the already established developmental classrooms and experimental classrooms and substantiates the model's replicability.

The inclusion of carefully prescribed and structured mainstreaming procedures (that have proven successful) represents a major contribution of the Harmony model in these days of "the least restrictive alternative." These procedures provide a structure within which general education teacher preceptions and needs, as well as the needs of the learning disabled student, are considered. Although the learning disabilities teacher takes responsibility for maintaining the integrity of the mainstreaming procedures, both teachers claim "ownership" of the student and his program. That this crucial cooperation is possible, is a function of the nature of the Harmony process.

The continuous hypothesis development and testing nature of the total system ensures that the student is always involved in classroom experiences geared to his/her individual learning status. Systematic procedures and regularly scheduled "check points" provide a framework for recognizing and solving concerns, problems, or changes that may occur as related to student progress or any aspect of the total program; thus, ensuring continued success.

Finally, the Harmony model has been developed and tested in actual classrooms for learning disabled students in three different Michigan school districts. Throughout its development and operation, the effectiveness of the model has been evaluated. The achievement of Harmony students has been compared to that of learning disabled students in "traditional" classrooms in a number of Michigan school districts. The data collection/research component of the project has been used to monitor the impact of the developing program on student learning and behavior, on special and general education teachers, on parents, and on school administrators. The results firmly support the model as an effective method for improving the school learning of learning disabled elementary students while keeping them in the mainstream of education.

SUMMARY

Project Harmony offers a viable instructional and mainstreaming model for programming for elementary learning disabled students in Michigan. This promising educational program has been validated and approved as a Demonstration Site by the Michigan Department of Education; and therefore, the Harmony model can be offered to school districts with similar educational needs.

Further information may be obtained by contacting:

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